

Priorities in Mental Health: Is occupational therapy following global directions

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Introduction:

Mental health (MH) research priorities were identified by occupational therapists (OTs) in studies in 2001 and 2008 (Bissett, Cusick & Adamson, 2001; Cusick, Albornoz & Bissett, 2009). Practitioners identified the need for research evidence on MH occupational therapy (OT) assessment, interventions, evaluation, roles, and practice approaches. An emerging OT research evidence base was apparent, but a clear gap in evidence-based practice was identified. Currently there is no understanding of the extent to which the practitioner research information priorities reflect global MH priorities. This information will ensure that research efforts and provision of research information is relevant, timely and consistent with global priorities in MH.

Objective:

To profile MH priorities identified by peak policy and service organisations across the globe in both English and Spanish, and compare OT MH research priorities for similarities and differences.

Method:

A literature review of English and Spanish sources was conducted using key terms of 'research', 'priorities', and 'mental health'. Searches of the National Health Department websites of Australia, United Kingdom (UK), Chile and the World Health Organisation (WHO) were completed. These countries were selected on the basis of affiliations in the research team.

Results:

MH priorities of peak government and non-government organisations in Australia, UK and Chile were consistent with those of the WHO. The WHO priorities focussed on establishing standards for MH care including provision of care, decreasing stigma/burden, MH promotion, mental illness prevention, MH staff training, and need for research. Furthermore, national priorities of the three target countries also focussed on health promotion, increasing research capacity and evidence, improved access to MH services, and consumer participation.

Conclusion:

The research priorities identified by OTs fit broadly within these WHO and national MH priorities and reflect the contribution that OT can make to addressing MH priorities.

Contribution to practice/evidence base of OT:

OT research priorities are consistent with international MH priorities. OTs are seeking information in areas that support their work in addressing global priorities in MH. Whilst research information is emerging, more research is required in areas that practitioners and peak MH organisations identify as priorities.